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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1540  
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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [KDEN](#) [BG](#)  
SUBJECT: INTER-PARTY DIALOGUE CONTINUES

REF: A. DHAKA 06091  
[1](#)B. DHAKA 06185

Classified By: CDA a.i. Geeta Pasi, reason para 1.4 d.

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The secretaries general of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the opposition Awami League held today their fourth round of election talks. The Awami League's Abdul Jalil afterwards told reporters the two sides are close to agreement on an unidentified issue, but media, and privately leaders from both parties, remain pessimistic about prospects for a breakthrough. The next round is scheduled for October 16, when both PM Khaleda Zia and Awami League president Hasina will be abroad. On the key issue of who heads the next caretaker regime, there is little sign of flexibility from either side. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On October 10, Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) Secretary General Mannan Bhuiyan and his Awami League (AL)

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counterpart, Abdul Jalil, held their fourth round of talks at parliament on election issues. Who heads the next caretaker regime, has emerged as the pivotal issue. The Awami League insists that Justice Hasan the presumptive chief caretaker adviser, is disqualified by his BNP past, and that this issue must be resolved before the AL's other demands are addressed.

PM Zia continues to insist that existing constitutional provisions should apply for the election. "We want peace and consensus," she told reporters yesterday, "but that does not mean that we have to accept whatever the opposition wants."

[1](#)3. (C) The Awami League sees the dialogue as a pressure tactic against the ruling party. On October 9, Hasina charged that the BNP was forced to the table by overwhelming public support for AL demands, and urged her supporters to be on guard against efforts to foil the talks. Hard-line AL Presidium member Sheikh Salim, a cousin of Hasina's, told us Jalil's upbeat public stance is designed to "encourage" the voters and put the onus on the BNP for any breakdown.

[1](#)4. (C) Two weeks ago, the AL indicated to U.S. and UK diplomats that it would agree to replace Justice Hasan with Justice Mahmudul Amin Chowdhury. (Ironically, Justice Chowdhury, as a judicial reform measure, had publicly lobbied for the constitutional amendment raising the retirement age of judges, which is what put Justice Hasan in line to be chief caretaker adviser.) Jalil went public with the offer after the third round of talks during an interview with a local TV station, which he then apparently tried to get pulled because it violated an agreement not to divulge dialogue specifics without the consent of both parties.

15. (C) AL and BNP leaders privately downplay prospects for a breakthrough. The AL complains that Bhuiyan lacks clear negotiating authority from Khaleda Zia. Bhuiyan, the AL's Salim said, told Jalil he personally has no objection to replacing Hasan but other party leaders are intransigent, a judgment we have heard from other senior BNP figures. "But maybe something dramatic will happen at the end," Salim added. "Maybe Justice Hasan will say he is not ready to take up the responsibility and withdraw. That would save both parties from losing face."

16. (C) Haris Chowdhury, Zia's political secretary who is on the campaign trail with her in northern Bangladesh, confirmed to us today that Zia and Bhuiyan have not recently met to discuss the dialogue. He stressed, however, that "accepting the opposition demand to drop Hasan is out of the question."

17. (SBU) The next round of talks is scheduled for October 16, even though both party leaders will then be abroad: PM Khaleda Zia departs for Saudi Arabia on October 14, and AL president Sheikh Hasina leaves for the U.S. on October 12. Jalil himself will make a brief visit to Singapore on October 13, apparently in connection with his recurring health problems.

18. (C) Comment: Bangladeshis remain more hopeful than optimistic that the inter-party talks will break the political impasse and smooth the way for successful elections in January 2007.  
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